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WILTON PARISH

A Brief Historical Sketch

JOHN E. ZANEMO

WILTON PARISH

1726 - 1951

Being a brief Historical Sketch of the Wilton Congregational Church *and* Ecclesiastical Society *from the establishment to the present day with additional Comments concerning the Traditions, Events & Personages of the venerable old* Town

By Robert Root
And Various Members of
The Church, Society & Town

Wilton
Connecticut
1951

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I never pass an old church by
But that it seems to testify,
That darkness cannot conquer light
That love shall some day subdue might.
An old church on a shaded hill
Makes me worship and be still.

—Galen Edward Hershey

WILTON PARISH

1726 - 1951

WILTON WAS SETTLED, early in the eighteenth century, for reasons remarkably like those which in 1951 make it such a rapidly growing Town. People then, as now, wanted to get away from the more heavily populated centers and to better their living conditions. Furthermore, the beauty and the munificence of the fertile meadows, winding streams and high ridges of the land to the north of the Township of Norwalk appealed as much to "ye Inhabitants of Kent-Beldons Hill, Chestnut Hill and So Upwards" in that early day as it does to the commuters and residents of today. There is, therefore, a striking similarity between the first settlement of Wilton and the request for "Parrish Privi-

leges" in 1726 and the influx of new people and the development of the Town on the occasion of its 225th Anniversary Celebration in 1951.

In the first years after the Pilgrims landed, most of the towns in Connecticut were organized along the coast. In the Norwalk area, white settlers had their farms next to the plots of the Indians, fishermen and tillers, who lived on sea food and maize. Almost inevitably, differences rose between them. The Indians filed many damage claims against the whites because the settlers' hogs were constantly getting into the Indian plantings. And on the other hand, as the population increased, the Colonists coveted the Indian lands.

As a result, the Indians of Norwalk were ordered—sometime after the middle 1600's—to move to the Chestnut Hills, and thus became the first substantial body of settlers in what is now Wilton.

Meanwhile, tradition has it, the first scattered Colonial homes were built in the area now called South Wilton. However, in those days of virtually compulsory Church attendance, removal too far from the village green and its Church was not attractive, and the real push towards settlement of the interior waited on the growth, through immigration, of a large group which had no automatic rights to the common lands of the Colony. These

latecomers had to buy rights of commonage from the original "proprietor" or "stockholding" families who owned the commons, and, therefore, such newcomers were tempted to move to the outskirts, as were many of the sons of the original settlers. Some families had already gone to start Danbury in 1685. In 1708, other Norwalkers bought land from the Indians to found Ridgefield. In the early eighteenth century, too, new settlers moved by horse-drawn cart to new homes in the Wilton area, though carefully avoiding the "wolf pitts beyond" (presumably commemorated by Wolf-pit Road), for "there still lurked the wolf, the catamount, and other wild beasts, ready to come down with their depredations upon the flocks and herds of the new settlers." The first homestead here was built in Cannondale "above Pimpawaug" (which is Algonquin for "narrow place") and became known exotically as "Egypt."

Meantime, proprietors with a speculative turn of mind saw that quick profits could be made by sale of these "wild" lands to the north. The areas would be more valuable, of course, if that long trip down to meeting every Sunday could be eliminated. The stage for establishment of a Church in the Wilton region was set!

To get a Church nearer home, the inhabitants of Wilton that year petitioned Norwalk to

permit them to form a Parish of their own. The Wilton historian, the late Deacon G. Evans Hubbard, pictures what was probably happening in the fall of 1725. "We can easily imagine the Wilton farmers bringing their grain to Benjamin Hickox's Mill on the Fall Branch (now known as the Merwin Falls) back of the present Congregational Church. Mr. Buckingham (Minister of the Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk) had been very strict, they may have said, in requiring the new settlers up the Norwalk River to attend his Church regularly the past winter, the state of the roads notwithstanding. Another winter was at hand. Mr. Buckingham was unpopular in Norwalk (due apparently to 'unbecoming' habits, a reference possibly to tippling—not an uncommon practice in those early days). Could we not have a Church of our own?"

Norwalk cooperatively approved the Petition. In February, 1726, the Norwalk Parish granted "Tenn Acres of land" to the new Parish "for the use of the Presbiterian or Congregationall ministery among them forever." A little later it gave twenty-three acres more. Beyond that, the Town "by a major vote granted to the inhabitants of ye upper society, the old pulpit, upon free gift." If Wilton had no Church, it at least now had a pulpit!

Then, just 225 years ago, in response to

a Petition by thirty-one persons interestingly worded:

> The Humble Petition of ye Inhabitants of Kent, Beldens Hill, Chestnut Hill, and So Upwards within the Township of Norwalk . . . . . Humbly Showeth that by and with ye Comfort, Approbation & Incouragement of our Ancestors, Progeniters & primitive Settlers and Others of ye Ancient Society in the sd Township to have been indeavoring to prepare an fitting our Selves for a Uniform Society and fixed Congregation for the Worship of God and ye Administration of such Ordinances belonging thereunto, and to be a Parrish or Village by our Selves and in Reference to what ye Town hath Acted or Done in this Affaire; We here with Exhibit attested Copies Transcribed out of ye Records of ye Minits of ye Town Acts whereby Your Honrs may be Satisfied in our hitherto proceedurs, and Would Encourage our Selves that we may be Your Honrs Favorites, in Granting unto us Parrish Priviledges, whereby we may proceed Legally in What is Necessary for ye Obtaining the Special Ends Aimed at, And that Your Honrs would give us the name of Wilton Parrish in Norwalk, And Your Honrs therein will much oblige Your Most Humble Petitioners who in Duety Bound Shall Ever pray etc.

the Connecticut General Assembly created a new entity (but not yet a "Town") by voting approval to these words (May 12, 1726): "This Assembly do hereby Grant that the said inhabitants (of Kent, Beldons Hill, Chestnut Hill and So Upwards) be one Village enjoying Parrish Privileges and that they may be called by the name of Wilton Parrish."

This was the first time that the name Wilton was used. Why this was chosen is not known, though the Town is popularly believed to be named after Wilton in Wiltshire, England, because David Lambert, later "town taverner," had come from there.

The Church was organized early that summer (the first meeting of the Wilton Society of which there is any record is that of June 7, 1726). The rest of that year, the Parish was busy building its first Meeting-House at a point then near the center of population, south of Wolfpit Road, near the present railroad track. Later this original Church building was virtually forgotten, so that John Gaylord Davenport could reminisce in 1916, "Although my own boyhood was spent but a short distance from the consecrated spot and I was very familiar with the place, a favorite resort for huckleberry seekers, no hint of its history was ever given me."

However, just 100 years ago, when the railroad was built through to Danbury, excavation of ten whitened skeletons indicated where the burial grounds had been and where the first Meeting-House stood. The markers used were field stones. After the discovery, the remains were removed to the Sharp Hill Cemetery.

Before that first year was over, the Society had voted that the Meeting-House should be "rectified by laying the floor, and by plastering

the walls, and by making comfortable seats to sett in." This business of seating was so important that in November a committee of three was appointed to "seat it by list and age, according to the best of their judgment." One member found the task so delicate that he immediately resigned, and was replaced.

It took two months to resolve the differences on seating status. For if democracy was being born in America, the old aristocratic ideas insisted on protocol. Men of age and wealth had to have the best seats (the women and children taking inferior places, of course,) and in some Parishes there were heated discussions and even bitter legal disputes over the ranking.

In this Church, wealth got an edge over age. At the head of the Great Pew sat Joseph Birchard, whose prominence at 53 put him over John Stuart, the Norwalk Town surveyor, who was 59. The wealthy farmer, John Keeler, 45, also had a spot over his cousin Ralph, 53.

Music got recognition, significantly, six years later when John St. John was given a choice seat "so long as he sets ye tune."

Incidentally, at that time, all Wiltonians were fined five shillings for every failure to attend Church on Sundays, Fast Days and Thanksgiving. (At Hartford the fine was ten shillings!) These Sunday laws were enforced, too. At New Haven, for example, one William

Blagden fell into some water late Saturday, could not legally light a fire Sunday to dry his clothes, and so went to bed to keep warm. He was found guilty of "sloathefulness' for missing Church and sentenced to be "publiquely whipped."

At this time, Wilton is said to have had its stocks and whipping post, too, opposite the present site of St. Matthew's Church. Here also were several of the Town's taverns, where public notices were posted, newspapers could be read, and Town and Society meetings frequently held. Usually, these old taverns had only one public room, the rest of the house being used by the inn-keeper's family, so that a historian remarks of the comforts: "The traveller who hesitated to share not only his room but his bed with an entire stranger was considered so fastidious as to be quite unreasonable. Many a horseman slept on the floor, and if he used his saddle for a pillow, he knew it would not be stolen."

For the first half century of the Wilton Parish, it should be remembered, the Church members owed allegiance to the British crown and flag. King George I of England ruled the colony in 1726, and the parishioners undoubtedly prayed or sang loyally, "God save the king!" Louis XV was King of France in that year and Germany was a group of independent states not to be unified for a century

and a half. George Washington was not to be born for six years, and Napoleon for forty-three. When this Church was organized, only sixteen of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence had yet been born; and the Church was already fifty years old when the Declaration was made.

In 1726, New England congregations were called to the Meeting-House by the beating of a drum, the blowing of a conch shell or a horn, displaying a flag, firing a gun, or if the community was fortunate enough to have one, by the "wringing of a bell." Since the Norwalk Church used a "drumb", probably a drum was also used in Wilton at the beginning.

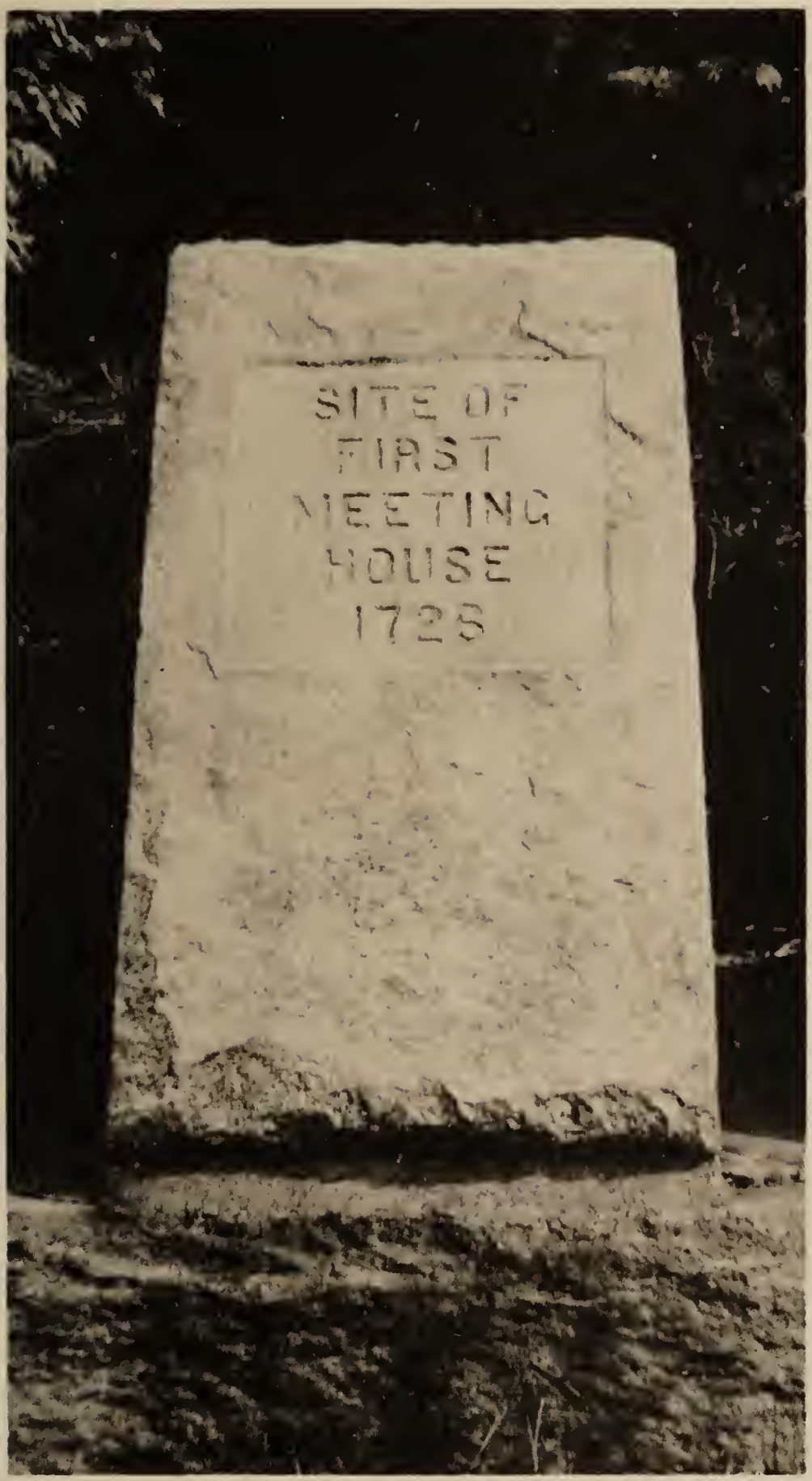
As the call came, families near the Meeting-House started out walking in "desent order," man and wife first and other members of the family in twos behind them. Farmers mounted their substantial farm horses, and wife or child rode on a pillion, or cushion, behind.

There is no indication that these early Wiltonians dressed drably when they went to Church. A little later, in fact, the Church no doubt saw "hooped petticoats and laced hoods, and long embroidered gloves," and "velvet coats and satin breeches and embroidered waistcoats, gold lace and sparkling buckles." As today, however, the Minister probably wore a black Geneva gown with white bands, as did almost all early Congregational clergymen.

In Norwalk during the first year of the new Parish, the affair of the Reverend Mr. Buckingham had come to an unedifying conclusion. His thunderings against his wayward congregation were reinforced in 1727 by a great earthquake which convinced many of their sins. "Considering the frowns of heaven upon them," the Norwalk Church set "a day for the humbling and abasing their souls before the Lord by fasting and prayer for redress." But the retreat was short-lived. The next week a meeting terminated Mr. Buckingham's ministry.

In spite of this nearby example, the Wilton Parish promptly got itself into difficulties when it chose its first Minister. Almost as much mystery surrounds the shortcomings of the Reverend Mr. Robert Sturgeon as the Reverend Mr. Buckingham.

Mr. Sturgeon was apparently educated in Scotland, but for unknown reasons the Presbytery there declined to give him a license to preach. Though referred to in the records as "the Reverend," he had possibly not been ordained. Shortly after arriving in Massachusetts in 1721, he got into the bad graces of the famous and influential Cotton Mather. Having left his home "under some embarrassments," he was nevertheless licensed in New England, "greatly to the regret of the Reverend Mr. Cotton Mather, by reason of his conduct



Marker on Wolfpit Road

THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The interior of the Church at Christmas time 1949

201

To the Honourable General Court
or Assembly of his Majesties Colony of
Connecticut Conven'd at Hartford May ye 12th
1726.

The Humble Petition of ye Inhabitants of Kent
Beldens Hill, Chessnut Hill, and so Upwards within the
Township of Norwalk, ...

Humbly Sheweth That by and with ye Consent, Approbation
& Incouragement of our Ancestors, Progenitors & primitive
Settlers and Others of ye Ancient Society in the s^d Township
we have been Indeavouring to prepare and fill our Selves for
a Uniform Society And fixed Congregation for the Worship of
God And ye Administration of Such Ordinances belonging there-
unto, And to be a Parrish or Village by our Selves, And in
Reference to what ye Town hath Acted or Done in this Affaire
we here with Exhibit attested Copies Transcribed out of ye Records of ye Minits
of ye Town Acts whereby your Hon^rs may be Satisfied in our hitherto
proceedurs and Would Encourage our Selves that we may be your Hon^rs
Favourites, in Granting unto us Parrish Privileges, whereby
we may proceed Legally in What is Necessary for ye Obtaining
the Special Ends Aimed at, And that your Hon^rs would give
us the Name of Wilton Parish in Norwalk, And your Hon^rs
therein will Much Oblige Your Most Humble Petitioners
who in Ducty Bound Shall Ever pray &c

John Stewart
Benjamin Hickcock
John Keeler
Matthew Saint John
Daniel Keeler
John Saint John
Daniell Betts
Samuel Betts
Stephen Betts
Natha^a Glason
Jon^a Wood
Jonathan Wood Juner
Nathan Betts
Daniel Trobridge
Richard Bouton
Obadiah Wood
Thom. Bouton
Lemuel Trowbridge
Jonathan Sturdevant
Ralph Keeler
Jacob Gregory
John Dunning
Nathaniel Lockham
John Taler
William Parker

Jonathan Elmer
Joseph Gump
Daniel Stewart
Joseph Carle
Nathan Olmsted
Stephen Buckingham

This Assembly grants the prayer of the within Petition and order that a bill be drawn thereon in forme

Past in the Lower house
T. W. Thos. Kimberly Clerk
Past in the Upp^r House
Jos. Hez. Wyllys Secret^y

THE PETITION TO THE GENERAL COURT MAY YE 12TH 1726

here and at home."

Mr. Sturgeon was called to the Parish at Watertown, Mass., and the next year, on Mather's complaint to the courts, he was indicted for "continuing his wicked and malicious inclination to overthrow, ruin and subvert, as well the Church in said Watertown, as the other Churches of this province." Found guilty, he was fined twenty pounds and costs.

Notwithstanding this story, the Wilton Church installed the Reverend Mr. Robert Sturgeon as its first Minister in 1726. However, after a brief reign of peace, a note of discord arose because the new Minister failed to bring his family from Europe. The Parish asked him "to apply to the Presbetry to use all proper means to induce his wife to come over into New England." If that happened, they would "sett down esse and contently."

In due course, the family did come, and Mr. Sturgeon earned a reputation for Biblical facility when he preached, the day of their arrival, on the text, "We have seen strange things today!"

The Church apparently did not find his way of life entirely acceptable; but since it brought no formal charges, the complaints are not known. Perhaps his religious opinions, which were not all in harmony with the Westminster Catechism, were disliked; for when employing his successor, the Church made stip-

ulations about adherence to professed principles.

In calling him, the Parish had agreed to pay ninety pounds and give him "a full supply of firewood for his family's use . . . to be brought to his habitation from time to time as is needed." Five acres were also granted for a "house loot" (lot).

But it appears that the Congregation lagged in getting in the wood. Perhaps Mr. Sturgeon suffered from the cold. At any rate, five days before Christmas that first year, the Society voted that "every man shall bring unto the Reverend Mr. Sturgeon a load of wood within fourteen days" and set a three-shilling fine for failure.

This must not have worked too well, for the next December, the Society voted to make payments to those who brought wood. A year later, Ebenezer Jackson was granted nine pounds to furnish enough wood to Mr. Sturgeon for a year. Finally, in 1730, abandoning the generalities, the Society voted that he should have twenty-eight cords of wood a year.

Meantime, dissatisfaction with the "life and conversation" of Mr. Sturgeon increased, and in 1731 a Council was called to consider his dismissal. There is no record of a vote of termination, but his ministry must soon have ended, for the next spring steps were being

taken to get a new Minister.

After giving him a three-week's trial, the Society now extended a call to the Reverend Mr. William Gaylord, 22-year-old graduate of Yale College. Born in Hartford, he was on his father's side the great-grandson of a Deacon who arrived in Massachusetts from England in 1631, and on his mother's side the great-grandson of the Reverend Mr. Samuel Stone, long a colleague of Thomas Hooker at Hartford.

Perhaps because he had heard about the slow wood deliveries to Mr. Sturgeon, the new young Minister delayed in answering the call. At any rate, six weeks later, a new committee was appointed "to treat with Mr. Gaylord as to terms of settlement and salary." His pay was set at sixty-five pounds, to be paid in money or provisions, another call was given, and he accepted.

For more than its first century, the Church had the custom of voting a 200-pound "settlement" to a young Minister to enable him to buy a house, land, furniture, books and whatever else he needed for his life and work. Remembering Mr. Sturgeon's religious ideas, and realizing it could not often afford such a settlement, the Society provided that "if Mr. Gaylord turn from ye opinion or principles he now professes, contrary to ye mind of ye Society, then he is to return to ye Society ye

two hundred pounds again."

A Council convened in February, 1733, and examined Mr. Gaylord's beliefs carefully, and he was ordained. So he began a pastorate of nearly thirty-four years, longer than any other of the Church and, with two exceptions, double the length of any other.

Mr. Gaylord's character has been memorialized by the careful records he kept for the Church from 1733 until 1766.

"He was methodical and exact," said the Reverend Mr. Samuel G. Willard in his scholarly 150th Anniversary Address. "He was sound in faith, not a man of extreme views, and probably would be reckoned a moderate Calvinist. His epitaph in Sharp Hill Cemetery reads:

"Here lies Interred ye Body of the Revd. William Gaylord who departed this life Janry. ye 2d 1767 in the 58th Year of His Age and 35th of his Ministry

He was an able Divine a faithfull Minister
& a meek & humble Christian. his Love
for Souls was very great, in proof of
which he Spent his life in unwearied
indeavours for ye Conversion of Sinners
and Edification of Saints, & among
many other Excilences, he Eminently
merited ye Character of a Peace maker,
& is now undoubtedly reaping ye Reward
of Such in the Kingdom of his Lord."

Whatever his other virtues, Mr. Gaylord

had the reputation of being a dull speaker. There is a story that, when he once preached at Ridgefield, the Congregation found the sermon uninteresting. Later, the Ridgefield Minister borrowed the sermon and preached it, without comment, to the same people. When the Congregation praised it as superior to Mr. Gaylord's from the same text, the Minister replied that "he could always preach well when he could get one of Mr. Gaylord's sermons to preach."

Just before his ordination, Mr. Gaylord was married to the daughter of a Stamford Pastor, and after bearing seven children, she died 14 years later of pulmonary tuberculosis. On the Church records, her husband carefully recorded his eulogy of her as "a good wife to me, both in spirituals and temporals, prudent, faithful, loving, loyal, and very respectful." Perhaps the latter words indicated something of the century's beliefs about the subservience of woman to her husband. In any case, women have a very small role in the written records of the early Church. In the year Mr. Gaylord became Pastor, the records show that women outnumbered men in the membership—forty-one women in full communion, to thirty-five men.

However, for more than a year, a Mrs. B and a Miss Polly C, did occupy the attention of the Deacons. A pair of spectacles had been

lost, and one accused the other of stealing them! A final entry in the records states that "nothing more shall be said of it."

Mr. Gaylord married again, and his family grew to a total of thirteen children. But death, which had taken one of his first children in early childhood, continued to bring tragedy into the Minister's family. He recorded the death of two young daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah, from "a sore Grievious consumptive illness." And Colonial warfare brought death to his 20-year old son, Moses, who had just "been from home in ye expidition ag'st Montreal a little more than four month." From this family, however, it would not be accurate to conclude that in the early days of the Wilton Church its members married early, had many children, and died at early ages. There was an average of only 4.5 deaths per year during the first dozen years of Mr. Gaylord's ministry, and of 6.8 per year during the next ten.

If Mr. Gaylord was a dull Preacher, he seems nevertheless to have drawn crowds. The Congregation grew, and soon the Parish felt it needed a larger Meeting-House. In the fourth year of Mr. Gaylord's ministry, (December, 1736), it was voted that a new Meeting-House "be built on ye Sharp Hill, with ye fore or broad side directly to the South." This location, on the east side of Danbury Road at

Sharp Hill Road, is marked today by the old cemetery which accompanied it.

The new building was modeled after "ye prime antient" Meeting-House of Norwalk (which was probably the one burned by the British four decades later). The pews were six feet square, with the one next to the pulpit stairs reserved for the Deacons and leading men, and with "the two hind seats" set aside for the growing Gaylord flock. The old Meeting-House was sold in 1739 "att a vandue [auction—*ed.*] at sun one hour high at night." The proceeds were devoted toward finishing the new one. The Land comprising the present Sharp Hill Cemetery was given by John Marven, Sr., and an additional half acre was granted in 1755. The first recorded burial was in 1737. The last was in 1881, with the exception of that in 1934 of the late Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Spencer. This couple, who had been interested in the cemetery's restoration, willed a sum to the Society so that interest could be used for the cemetery's upkeep.

The cemetery was used 91 years after this second Church was abandoned, and 27 years after the present Hillside Cemetery was established.

If today parents find Wilton's schools a major interest, in that early day families also sought an education for their children. From 1712 to 1750 the Parishes or Ecclesiastical

Societies in Connecticut had charge of schooling. In the first two years, 1726 to 1728, there is a record that Nathaniel Ketchum of Belden's Hill was hired to teach in "the upper parish." In Wilton a committee of three, including Mr. Ketchum, then named Mr. Sturgeon teacher, to be paid by the "country (tax) money as far as it would go" and by tuition of the pupils. He apparently taught at the parsonage or around at the homes.

This arrangement did not last long. The next year, as the Parish was divided into three districts, it was provided that school was to be taught on Belden's Hill in June and July, in Pimpawaug in August and September, and in Kent and Chestnut Hill "as long as the money holds out!" (In 1792 came the further division into nine school districts—fragmentation which was not overcome until the relatively recent consolidation.)

As the second Meeting-House and cemetery were now completed, another building was built nearby at a cost of thirty pounds, for a Society and school house combined. The records mention the holding of a Society meeting here in 1741.

Members of the Congregation who came from any distance must have found this building even more important as a kind of community center on Sundays. The long morning and afternoon services were held in a Meeting-

House which, in winter, was without heat. But at noon, in this first "Parish House," the families could get together before a fireplace filled with burning logs, eat "pot luck," compare farming notes—and gossip. This building, apparently becoming unnecessary later, was sold two years before the Declaration of Independence.

This concern of the Church with public school matters was only one of many indications of the way government and religion merged in Wilton's early decades.

Today, newcomers have to learn that the "Church" is really two entities—an Ecclesiastical Society, concerned with temporal affairs; and a Church, concerned with spiritual affairs. This division was made necessary in Colonial New England because Churches were not allowed to become incorporated bodies, the feeling being that this would involve them in worldly matters. The Society, therefore, levied the taxes for the support of the Church as well as for the maintenance of the cemetery, the schools, the roads, and the militia. This arrangement lasted for almost a century until the new State Constitution of Connecticut separated Church and State in 1818, after which time Churches were incorporated if they so desired and were supported from that time on by voluntary contributions. The Wilton Church through the years has elected to keep its Ecclesiastical

Society.

The mingling of Society and State was plain in the original charter about a "Village enjoying Parrish Privileges," to be known "by the name of Wilton Parrish." In fact, the Ecclesiastical Society was organized first; it arranged for the building of the first Meeting-House; then it hired a Pastor—and not till then was the Church organized.

In its first spring (1727), one of the Wilton Society's earliest acts was to vote "to be free of training" under officers at Norwalk and to set up the Village's own company of militia. The schoolman, Ketchum, became leader of the band, first as lieutenant, then as captain. All the Colonial men from 16 to 55 were liable for service and required to possess a musket, rest, sword and bandolier. They trained at 8 o'clock in the morning during three spring and three fall months.

This company became the seventh in the Ninth Regiment during the fighting at mid-century, and meantime, Wilton contributed also to the "troop of horse" in the same regiment.

Throughout the 1700's, France and England were involved in a struggle of power and, on this side of the Atlantic, their clash over possession of the lands to the West resulted in the French and Indian War. From 1755 to 1758, Connecticut raised 13,500 men for this

war. The records indicate that five Wilton men were killed in this fighting. One was the Reverend Mr. Gaylord's son, previously mentioned.

During the Revolutionary War, Wilton sent 300 men to the Continental Army. The war itself came to Wilton in April, 1777, during the British drive to burn the depot at Danbury. The Wiltonians having gathered through the night, they formed a line at the bridge near the site of the present St. Matthew's Church. Some shots were fired and some British captured but, flanking the Wiltonians by crossing the river at Mill Road, the main body of the British marched off to Saugatuck by way of the present Dudley Road. The term "Tory Hole," still in use, refers to a place down Lovers' Lane behind the Church, which dates from this episode. Several Wilton houses were fired but none destroyed, for the retreat was too fast. It is recounted that, before the British were out of sight, a woman went with a pail of water from a neighboring home and put out flames set to a house near the militia's line. Nearby, a Tory woman and her Indian slave also were helping put out a fire in a barn where Continental stores had been kept.

The British made calls at several homes to request food. They appear to have secured this without incident, except perhaps at the home on Drum Hill of Deacon Daniel Gregory,

whose aged mother shook a poker at the intruders "to show them which side I was on."

The story has come down of another woman, Mary Cole, who acted courageously during this war when she heard that her husband was sick or wounded at White Plains. Braving the possibilities of meeting the British or the "cowboys" on the New York-Connecticut "border," she rode over on horseback and brought him back to Wilton "on the same steed."

It was commonly believed that the lead statue of King George III at Bowling Green, New York City, was taken to Litchfield, Conn., and melted down into bullets to greet his soldiers. However, digging in Wilton years later revealed that at least part of it had been secretly buried here. Four hundred twenty-five pounds of lead were turned up, and presumably more may still lie in the Town's soil to this day.

The only other Revolutionary War incident involving Wilton came in the summer of 1779, when British raiders from the sea burned Norwalk. Wilton's third Minister, the Reverend Mr. Isaac Lewis, who had succeeded Mr. Gaylord and had in 1776 been chaplain of a Connecticut regiment, headed a company of men which went to Norwalk at that time. A cannon ball struck within three feet of him —but after the attempt to sack Wilton, even this must have seemed anti-climactic to the

Parish.

Mr. Lewis served the Church from 1768 to 1786—from the early days of complaint about the tax on tea to the latter days of the Articles of Confederation, and the battles of the Revolution. After a ministry of eighteen years, he was dismissed in a dispute over baptism and Church membership, and he became a Pastor at Greenwich for thirty-two years.

For eight years following, the Church could not agree upon a Minister who would accept. Several calls were issued, but perhaps because of the divisions and the small salary, no Minister would come until the Reverend Aaron Woodworth of Coventry, a recent Yale graduate, accepted and was ordained in 1794.

One of the most remarkable events in the Church's history was the erection of the present Meeting-House during this period of uncertainty without a settled Pastor!

In 1773, a vote had been taken to build a new Meeting-House. The Sharp Hill building was getting into bad repair, and the center of population had shifted further north. On Dec. 28, 1789, a decision was reached to erect it "on the Hill at the South Easterly part of Daniel Gregory's woodland." The Church was built with public funds, instead of by voluntary contributions, a special tax being levied over ten years to pay for it.

As far as possible, timbers of the old Church

were used in building the new one during the year 1790. The pulpit and seats were also transferred, and employed for thirteen years. The foundation stones of the old Meeting-House were used in fencing the Sharp Hill Cemetery.

There were three aisles in the Church originally, and the ceiling was arched. Four large pillars supported the galleries. Two pillars also supported a lofty, conical and ornamented sounding-board above the high pulpit. This sounding board was "painted a beautiful blue, with gilt bands and a bouquet of grain in gilt."

The Parish voted not to build a steeple unless "any man or men would build it at their own expense;" but somehow it was built. There is no record of a bell until 1801.

In spite of the tradition of the early white frame Church of New England, it was voted to paint this "with yellow ochre, and the roof Spanish brown." But happily, the new Meeting-House was actually painted white.

As the cornerstone indicates, the Meeting-House was dedicated in 1790 in December. The sermon was preached by the Reverend Mr. Timothy Dwight, who later became President of Yale. He took as his text the exclamation of Jacob after he had wrestled with the angel, "How dreadful is this place! This is but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

This Meeting-House is the oldest in Fairfield

County and one of the dozen oldest in the State.

During its long history, the pulpit has been filled by many distinguished visiting clergymen: The Reverend Mr. Josiah Sherman, Wilton-born brother of a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; the Reverend Mr. Zachariah Lewis, tutor to George Washington's family, and the Reverend Mr. Moses Stuart, also born in Wilton, the first great Hebrew scholar of the country.

Signaled by a growing dissatisfaction with some of the rigid rules of the past, the time had now come when a break with the early Colonial customs was inevitable. Church domination of the Town's life was no longer feasible. So, in the year 1802, two major steps were taken to transform the Colonial Wilton into a modern community much more as it is today. The State legislature in this year incorporated what had been the "Parish of Wilton" into a Town, and thereafter public Town business was no longer transacted in the Meeting-House. Now marriages and deaths were recorded in books of the Town.

Growing interest in other denominations also culminated in the formation of Wilton's second Church. With a liberal attitude toward other groups, the Wilton Church as early as 1764 had abated the tax for the Minister's support owed by Mr. Whelpley, "so long as

he attends the Baptist meeting and no longer." After 1772 the Society's collector turned over to the rector of St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Parish in Norwalk the Minister's "rate" collected from that Church's members in Wilton.

Now members of this Norwalk Parish, on July 1, 1802, established St. Matthew's Parish. Interestingly, the civil authority called this organizational meeting, according to the law, and the next year they erected their first Church building.

These important changes in Wilton came during the three-year pastorate of the Reverend Mr. John I. Carle, the Church's fifth Minister. He asked to be dismissed in 1804, but the Society refused such an orderly break and made charges of "irregularities in his Christian life and moral habits." In a word, it disapproved of his drinking. Mr. Carle left anyway and, according to tradition, died in New Jersey, a victim of intemperance.

Heavy and widespread drinking appears to have been the custom during these early decades. In addition to the shoe, hat and textile factories which Wilton had at the beginning of the nineteenth century, five distilleries were operating here. Even when the temperance movement got underway in the Town, it banned only distilled liquors.

By 1829, this reformation had gained enough strength that one man tried to get workmen

to build a barn for him without the aid of alcohol, but so many men refused to complete the work in these dry conditions, that he was obliged to send for strong drink. A few weeks later, however, another man managed to get his barn built without supplying anything stronger than ale. This was said to be the first large building in Wilton to be built without the assistance of hard liquor!

The Church's next Pastor was an enthusiastic supporter of the temperance movement, the Reverend Mr. Haight. He was Minister for 21 years, but his outspoken convictions appear to have made an increasing number of enemies toward the end of his pastorate. In Mr. Willard's rather quaint language, "perhaps a greater prudence of speech, when silence had been golden, had enabled him longer to escape some of the unfriendliness." Nevertheless he was dismissed in 1831 and thereafter preached in Bethel and South Norwalk and lived a time in Wilton itself.

Dr. Sylvester Willard, a Wilton-born physician, has left a striking impression of this Pastor's towering figure:

"Mr. Haight was a man of quick impulses and ponderous energy . . . His person was massive, his head large, and his skin bronzed. When in after years I saw and heard Daniel Webster, I was greatly impressed with a similarity between them. . . .

"I remember the beautiful summer afternoon in August, 1831, when a mere child, I went with my father to hear his farewell sermon. He was in the lofty pulpit of the old Church, which was very high and seemed to my childish eyes a great deal higher than it really was . . . When he concluded his sermon the people wept; his heart was swollen with emotion, and his voice faltered, but with immense power and solemnity he concluded, 'Amen! and amen to this Bible,' at the same time laying his hand with heavy emphasis upon it. I was frightened, and thought the world was coming to an end. On the way home, I remember, I asked my father if there were to be no more Sundays! He replied: 'Yes, but Mr. Haight is not to be our Minister any longer.' "

During Mr. Haight's ministry there had been two powerful revivals, and many families were added to the Church. In the Church at large during this period, there was a general religious enthusiasm which brought the establishment of Sunday Schools and the foundation of Congregational mission work; and in Wilton, about 1816, a Sunday School was started to offer organized instruction in religion to the Parish children for the first time. Special Sabbath garments and shoes were prepared, and on Sundays the children flocked to the Nathan Davenport home to put them on and march in order to Sunday School, and later they would

return to the house, exchange the new garments for their old ones, and go on to their homes.

One of the first steps after the installation of Mr. Haight's successor, the Reverend Mr. Samuel Merwin, was the construction of the present parsonage in 1832-3. The lot was purchased from Nathan Comstock with funds made available through the sale of a piece of property and a gift of $800 previously willed to the Church by Deacon Jonathan Middlebrook. Mr. Merwin and his family were the first occupants of the parsonage, which has been in continuous use to the present day. Due to impaired health, Mr. Merwin was dismissed at his own request after a pastorate of six years during which time the Church had a large growth in membership and a deepening of its spiritual life.

The Reverend Mr. John Smith, who had been born in Wethersfield and had studied at Yale, Andover and Princeton, was installed as the new Minister in 1839. He had been an agent of the American Tract Society, and three years after his coming to Wilton, ninety-five persons came into the Church on a single Sunday, most of them by profession of faith. About fifty of them were baptized at the same time. This appears to have been the biggest revival in the Church's two hundred and twenty-five years.

The evangelical interests were carried on

by the man who succeeded Mr. Smith in 1848. He was the Reverend Mr. Gordon Hall, son of one of the first five missionaries which the Congregational Church had sent to India. The new Minister had been born in Bombay, and while he was still a boy, his father died of cholera on the veranda of a Hindu temple. The son had managed to go to Yale, where he was graduated with high honors. After about four years in the Church, he accepted a call to Northampton, Mass.

Slavery now became a burning issue in Wilton, and one of its homes (at Danbury and Westport Roads) served as a station on the "underground railway" to help escaping slaves. When Civil War came, one-hundred and forty-one Wiltonians served in the War—five of them being Negroes out of a population of twenty-five Negroes. Thirty-five substitutes were hired by individuals or by the Town.

The profits from wartime production of shirts, shoes and woven-wire were a boon to the Town, and indirectly to the Church. During the War, the Town reached a population peak of more than 2,200—a total not reached again until the 1930's. Following the Civil War, a decline in the population set in which was to last for more than half a century. But, as if unaware of it, the Church went on to days that were among its most energetic.

Certainly one of the highest points was

the celebration of the 150th anniversary in 1876. The vigor of the Church in that era is indicated clearly by the 112-page hard-covered book giving an account of the observance. John Gaylord Davenport later recalled that gala event of forty years before:

"The midsummer day was perfect, scarcely a cloud veiling the intense blue of the skies . . . At an early hour people from many another locality came pouring into the center, on foot or brought by teams of every description, and with not a single automobile or motorcycle to disturb the serenity of the well-groomed horses . . .

"As we entered the vestibule the word 'WELCOME' touched our hearts, and a glimpse of the audience-room showed it to be elaborately decorated with evergreens and flowers, roses in profusion in every part of the room, blushing like the brides who during the years had passed up the aisles on one of the most serious errands of their life. Floral festoons swept gracefully from a point above the pulpit, while the figures '1726' and '1876', skilfully fashioned of flowers appeared upon the wall on either side . . .

"Soon the house was filled to its utmost capacity, almost every face seeming to beam with a peculiarly joyous light."

The 150th observance was held during the pastorate of the Reverend Mr. Samuel J. M.

Merwin, son of the Church's eighth Pastor. He was succeeded in 1881, after 12 years in which the Church grew markedly, by the Reverend Mr. Frank Thompson of Windham, Conn.

An Englishman by birth, Mr. Thompson had gone to sea as a young man and became captain's mate on a packet ship. During one of the voyages, he experienced conversion to Christianity. However, at Wilton he contracted a lung illness and so, in 1883, he left to become seaman's chaplain at Valparaiso, Chile. During this pastorate, a zealous new band of children called the "Light Bearers" was organized to support foreign missions.

It was now decided to make the labors of future pastors less arduous by reducing the Sunday services from three to two! The Church voted in 1884 "to commence the Morning Service at 11 o'clock, having the Sunday School follow, after a recess of ten minutes, and in the evening a regular service to be conducted by the Pastor or the Preacher in charge, either as a prayer or conference meeting, or as a formal preaching service."

Later that year, the Reverend Mr. Charles E. Upson began a two-year pastorate here, and, in 1885, the Parish engaged in one of its occasional programs of Church remodeling.

The first remodeling had been done when the building was fifty-four years old. Up until

then, the original high pulpit and sounding-board had been the most striking features of the auditorium. Some apparently liked this very well. One member later described "its plain walls and lofty pulpit, with its majestic sounding-board above it, and the square, straight-back pews." Another wrote fondly of "the old pulpit in the shape of a goblet, with the stem for a support, and the high uncarpeted stairs, with a door to enter the pulpit, which was shut tight when the Minister got in."

But the majority tired of the old style. At the Annual Meeting of 1844, the Society voted to remove the sounding-board. Even before the meeting adjourned, one member, who was expert with tools, appointed himself a committee of one, got a saw, and carried the vote into effect.

Even with this "crowning glory" gone, it seemed necessary to those of that day that more had to be done. The Church vigorously went to work. It took out the box pews and pew doors, removed the columns supporting the vaulted ceiling, installed a flat ceiling, put in a new pulpit, and added the Greek influenced "false front" of the present Meeting-House. Tradition says that in the next decade an Italian artist, who boarded nearby and who entertained Wilton with operatic singing, frescoed the ceiling ornately, and the Romanesque style was carried also into painted arch and columns behind the

pulpit. A few years later a Wiltonian spoke of a "comely sanctuary . . . with its new-fangled fresco and organ, with its modern pulpit and pews."

If somewhat lower than the present one, the pulpit then was still high enough that a mid-nineteenth century Pastor took note of the height. An old member of the Church recalled that the Reverend Charles B. Ball, officiating at a child's funeral, said "I prefer to stand upon this platform rather than in the pulpit, that I may come nearer your hearts."

But now again in 1885, reconsidering the efforts of four decades before, the Society voted to renovate the interior. So $1,469.81 was raised, and the interior walls were redecorated, the woodwork painted, new cushions and carpets provided, the pulpit removed, and a platform built with "modern desk and chairs" upon it. The oil lamps for illumination bore the name of a Pittsburgh Lamp Company in letters two to three inches high.

Most significantly of all, perhaps, the stoves which had heated the building were taken out, and a furnace put in for central heating.

Meanwhile, the Parish remodelled the parsonage as well. With its additions and subtractions, it has variously had a pantry which was back of the present kitchen; a long kitchen, now gone; a large pantry which is now incorporated into the living room; and front

and side porches and a bay window, all removed within the last decade.

Along with the changes in the architecture of the Church came changes in the music. In his 150th anniversary poem, the Reverend Mr. John G. Davenport described this "evolution":

> I thought that Darwin's great idea
> Was scarcely proven true,
> But surely here's a striking case
> That bids us think anew!
> Consider the "development"
> Within so brief a while,
> Of this Grand Johnston Organ
> From Dr. Mead's bass-viol!

This refers to the fact that, early in the nineteenth century, a big choir, a fiddle and a bass-viol had provided the music from the lofty galleries of the original building. From the early days, there had been singing, with the pitch originally set by ear. Probably a tuning fork was the first musical instrument to have been introduced. Records of 1812 show that a committee was named to appoint a singing master, and a quarter century later a paid director for "leading the sacred music" was employed. Later he was engaged to teach a singing school in addition.

The new organ which was now installed, under the initiative of Mr. Johnston, the chorister, was built on Long Island. Some of

the more mature members of the Church today can recall how, as boys, they tried to keep awake long enough to hand-pump it at the right times. Only the experienced organist at the time, who presided for 40 years, knew how to control this instrument's squeaks and squeals, and installation of an electric pump did not completely remove the problem.

Meanwhile, women were beginning to come into their own in the Church. Beginning in 1879, the annual meeting passed an invitation to "the female members" to vote. For the first time, in 1892, three women were elected to the building committee, and in 1924 six women were elected members of the Ecclesiastical Society.

Even before they got an opportunity to help govern the Church, women had an important place, however. At about the time one of the Church's daughters, Susan Comstock, left for a mission to the Indians in Missouri and Arkansas, "thirty-one ladies" organized the Ladies Home Missionary Society in 1836. A Mission Band for foreign work was organized in 1880, and through the years it sent aid literally around the globe. These groups sent yearly donations away, earning many a dollar by stitching fine shirts for bachelors and widowers, and by quilting.

As the Church, in its early days, had sponsored the schools so during the nineteenth cen-

tury the Parish was closely related to education in Wilton. Hawley Olmstead, who had taught district school and had become the foremost student of Yale's Class of 1816, started the Wilton Academy in 1817 in a small Ridgefield Road building, later used by Nathan Comstock as a store.

Later, so that the Academy could erect its own building, Mr. Comstock granted land across from the Church to a committee of the Society "for the advancement of literature and science, and especially for the good will I have and bear to the Presbyterian Society of Wilton." The building, to be used not only for the school but "for religious and singing meetings," was erected in 1820 on a spot between the present parsonage and the Old Town Hall now known as the Garden Center, was later moved twice, and is now a private home. (Town meetings were held in the Meeting-House until this first Town Hall was built in 1832.)

Later the school was headed by Mr. Olmstead's son, Deacon Edward Olmstead, who conducted it for forty-three years, until his death in 1898. During more than forty years, Edward Olmstead was clerk of the Church, and in a resolution after his death the Church spoke of his "rare mental power and spiritual devotion" and praised the school for fitting students "for marked influence in Church and State." The Academy educated boys who later

became Governor, U. S. Senator, and leading Pastors.

By the beginning of the present century, Wilton's population was about one-third lower than at the high point forty years before, and still faced a further sharp decline. It was pointed out that in twenty-five years, the Town had lost about one hundred families; yet the membership of the Church had been increased slightly during this period.

The Parish went ahead in 1901 to celebrate the 175th Anniversary and on this occasion issued a 62-page book with hard covers to commemorate the event. However, the Reverend Mr. William D. Hart, who was Pastor from 1889 to 1910, took note in his address of the difficulties:

"The problem of the country Church is upon us. We have to face the question now to maintain a strong Church in a community where the population is continually decreasing. We have come to expect that many of our active members will go to the cities and larger towns for their permanent residence . . . Notwithstanding this constant drain upon our resources, the old Church has still a living, working force."

The 1910 census showed some increase over 1900, but the next decade brought a sharp drop, on down towards 1,200 persons. The Town simply could not struggle against the economic and social forces at work. Village industry was

out-dated, and the factories of the cities were attracting the workers. Yet, psychologically, many of the Town's citizens could not go back to the old pattern of subsistence farming on rocky soil.

Wilton's present distinctive characteristic, an interest in the arts, literature, and music, was foreshadowed when the Reverend Mr. Frederick M. Hollister, Minister from 1915 to 1920, founded the Community Chorus, now the popular and active Wilton Choral Club. Mr. Hollister also reflected the growing ecumenicity of Protestantism in initiating a series of union meetings with other Church groups in Wilton because of "the religious situation brought about by the great World War, which calls for a united Christianity to meet the added responsibilities for the moral and spiritual life of the people." Mr. Hollister resigned from this Church to enter home missionary service.

Reflecting the Wilton Church's concern in the world-wide Church, the Reverend Mr. Fred R. Bunker was called in 1920 from the mission field in Africa to provide leadership during those quiet days of the Town's history. Good works increased on the part of the women's groups, combined under Mrs. Bunker's leadership and known henceforth as the Women's League. One of their sons, Sidney Bunker, was commissioned and sent from the Church as a missionary to India, and he is now head

of Jaffna College in Ceylon.

Meanwhile, Wilton's picture began to change. If faster transportation had created such competition as to eliminate most of Wilton's little industries, now it converted the community into a suburban town for those working in New York and nearby Connecticut cities. From 1,284 in 1920, population rose ten years later to 2,130 and twenty years later to 2,829, and on up to an estimated 4,600 today. Now the Town Planning Committee suggests it may be as high as 8,000 by 1960. It seems a long time since it was possible to write, as the WPA Guide of 1938 did, that Wilton is a "community where life is still unhurried as it was during Colonial days!"

This rapid influx meant a marked change in the complexion of the population. Soon, two-thirds of those in the Town were persons born outside New England. A study by the Department of Sociology at Connecticut State College, published in 1939, showed that the newcomers were generally younger than the old-timers, and were, therefore, generally in the young-child stage of family life.

This meant a population with a potential high interest in Schools and Churches. The days of the Wilton Academy, which had drawn many of its pupils from almost every state in the union and even from foreign countries, seemed already far away. Steps to make education more

up-to-date were taken in the district schools during the Twenties, and, in 1929 and 1934, Wilton centralized its schools. This has meant construction of two modern buildings, and now the talk is of another primary school and separate high school as well. Thus far has education advanced here since the Church began the first little class 225 years ago.

In the early years of growth, the commuters largely passed the Church by, and the sociologists noted that "Congregationalists include mostly the older residents." The Congregational Church included 37 heads of households, of whom two-thirds were considered active.

The most serious aspect of the report was the finding that the majority of the people in town belonged to no Church at all. "While 95 per cent of the Wilton householders have religious preference of some sort, less than half carry it as far as actual membership in a church," said the study. "Of those who do, five out of eight are affiliated with outside churches." Only 55.2 per cent of the Congregationalists in the Town belonged to this Church.

"It seems clear that the suburban influx to Wilton has passed by the local churches to a very large extent," the sociologists concluded. "How is the relatively greater secularization of Wilton (than other Connecticut towns) to be accounted for? . . . The best suggestion would be to seek the answer in terms of the highly

intellectualized and individualized mental patterns of the newcomers, their urban background, and their lack of the traditionalism which has been a prime support of rural life and its attendant religious institutions."

However, these depressing conclusions were reached during a time when, for several reasons, the Church was undergoing a difficult period in its history. The years of financial depression had cut the income from endowed funds. The membership had been reduced by death and removal from the Town. The older members, who had served in office and borne the brunt of financial difficulties for years, could no longer see the possibility of making needed changes. Unfortunate personal difficulties had arisen, as in so many instances during the past history of the Church. With the help of the Connecticut Conference of Congregational Christian Churches and their able representative, the Reverend Mr. Paul Lynn, matters were adjusted, new interest aroused and needed compromises effected. The real vitality of the Church was evident at this turning point in its history.

For the first time a young man of western experience came to lead the Congregation. The Reverend Mr. Carl A. Hansen, who had just been graduated from Yale Divinity School and who had formerly been a superintendent of schools in Colorado, served the Church from 1942 to 1944. He brought energy and enthu-

The Reverend Mr. Albert C. Ronander

The old Communion Service still in use

The Parsonage, built in 1832
Used continuously as a parsonage since that time.

siasm to a growing Church.

In more recent years, commuters have come to make up a fair proportion of the Congregation. And the Church has been growing even faster than the Town. Between 1940 and 1950, the population of Wilton rose 61% but resident membership of the Church shot up 190%, from 78 to 226 and it is still going up.

This does not mean that the numbers of those outside the Church are not still much greater than those within. However, recognizing some of the inadequacies of the efforts to interest new families, the Parish in its 225th year has set up a large Calling Committee which is beginning to welcome newcomers and tell them about the Church.

During the pastorate of the Reverend Mr. Marvin P. Halverson, another young man from the West and a graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary, the Congregation began a general renovation of the old Meeting-House —not to "modernize" it this time, but to restore it to lines more like its original ones. The soundness of the old structure and its Connecticut oak timbers has been demonstrated through the years; even the notorious hurricane of 1938 did not blow it over. Mr. Halverson, in addition to his interest in early New England ecclesiastical architecture, also reintroduced the use of vestments worn by the clergy in that period, a practice which is becoming more com-

mon among present day Congregational Ministers.

The remodeling work got underway shortly after World War II. To date, an estimated $50,000 has been put into the Church restoration and the building of a new addition at the rear of the Church.

One of the most significant events, underlining the good relationships of the Wilton Churches, was the Sunday morning meetings of the Congregation at St. Matthew's Church, jointly with the Episcopal Parish, for a month in early 1946, while the restoration work was underway.

The Connecticut Yankee Fair, a gigantic auction with added attractions, was conceived to help raise money for the reconstruction. The first Fair in 1944 was a great success and six others have been held since. A vigorous campaign for funds was also inaugurated. The generous response on the part of the whole community was a measure of the awakened interest in the Church. Almost without exception, every member gave according to his means. In addition, many other friends responded. A larger part of the gifts went into the general fund, many of these being sacrificial gifts.

A feature of the renovation was the installation of the present wine-glass pulpit, in the Eighteenth Century style, which was a gift of the daughter of Mr. William D. Hart, devoted

and beloved Pastor of the Church for twenty-one years.

At the same time, the pipe organ installed in 1876 was replaced by the present organ, first a loan and later a gift from Deacon G. Evans Hubbard. Then carillonic bells, played from the choir loft, to echo from the bell tower, were put in, as a gift in memory of the parents of Mr. Charles A. Dana. They were first played on Christmas eve of 1948, and formally dedicated two days later. Meantime, illumination of the tower by spotlight on the ground had been started, to make the steeple stand out white and stately against the night.

In 1947 the Church received its present Communion Table, given in memory of Professor and Mrs. Strong Comstock by their children. It was an earlier member of this family, Major Samuel Comstock, who gave the silver for the Communion Service, still in use in the Church. Major Comstock served as a Revolutionary War officer, State legislator and long-time clerk of the Ecclesiastical Society. He willed his family silver to the Church in 1821 with these quaint words:

> "My Silver tankard which is a piece of Antiquity descended to me through a long line of honorable ancestors, and as there are a number of my nearest relatives members of the same Church with myself (that in the event of my decease) there are some anxiousty anticipating the use and enjoyment of that little valuable piece of antiquity, and as I am

> not willing to disappoint any of them in this respect, I can devise no way to dispose of it that will be so congenial to my own feelings and desires as to deposit it in the bosom of the Church of which I am a member to be used at the Lord's Table where they and all the members of the Church may participate in the sacred use of it forever to whom I bequeth it with all my heart that it may no longer travel from generation to generation through the world. If they see fit to new model it they can do it at their pleasure."

The silver was melted down and fashioned into flagons, cups and plates, now to be seen in the case at the rear of the sanctuary.

Meantime, the parsonage also has been completely modernized, thanks to the Building and House Committees, during the past ten years.

The present Hillside Cemetery, which had replaced the Sharp Hill Cemetery during the Nineteenth Century, consists of three parcels. Jonathan Middlebrook in 1817 gave the first, "one acre more or less . . . west on my own land so as to include in the grant the graves already made." Another, managed privately after burials began in 1853, was given in 1918. The most recent addition was in 1950 when a friend of the Church gave nineteen adjoining acres. While the earliest stone in this cemetery is dated 1817, graves also are believed to include Revolutionary soldiers and early members of the Middlebrook family.

The vitality of the Church today has been indicated by several new activities during the present pastorate of the Reverend Mr. Albert C. Ronander, now rounding out five years. In 1947, the Men's Club was formed for all interested men of the community, and it sponsors the Wilton Cub Scouts. The next summer, in cooperation with the League of Women Voters and St. Matthew's Parish, the Church started the Wilton Forums, on which have appeared such prominent speakers as Raymond Massey, actor; Reinhold Niebuhr, theologian, and Walter White, leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Also, in 1948 the Young Couples Club was formed.

A member of the Federal Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, this Church contributed to the numerous interdenominational relief drives following the War. The Social Action Committee has supported several projects, one of the most important of which was aiding in the relocation here of two "displaced persons" from Latvia, Dr. Aina Auskaps and her mother.

As the Church marks its 225th year, it looks forward to years of still greater activity and services ahead. One major objective is the completion of the restoration. Plans, now under consideration, call for construction of a large new Parish House with classrooms and hall,

restoration of the early vaulted ceiling and box pews and reconstruction of the bell tower to recapture the original graceful lines. The Congregation proposes to do this in the conviction that it has the responsibility and privilege to preserve this heritage for posterity.

But if the Church's vitality during the early days lay in the Colonial pioneers who braved the hazards of the interior to found Wilton, so, today, its future depends, not on its ancient Meeting-House, but on its people.

The members are confident as they face the future that despite the dislocations caused by war and the present tensions affecting all nations they can, with the help of God, continue to keep alive the faith of their fathers and press on hopefully to the goal of a better world.

MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH

Robert Sturgeon	1726-1732
William Gaylord	1733-1766
Isaac Lewis	1768-1786
Aaron Woodward	1794-1800
John I. Carle	1801-1804
Samuel Fisher	1805-1809
Silvanus Haight	1810-1831
Samuel Merwin	1832-1838
John Smith	1839-1848
Gordon Hall	1848-1852
Thomas S. Bradley	1853-1857
Charles B. Ball	1858-1859
Samuel R. Dimock	1859-1861
Wheelock N. Harvey	1862-1867
Samuel J. M. Merwin	1868-1880
Frank Thompson	1881-1883
Charles E. Upson	1884-1886
Dwight M. Seward	1886-1889
William D. Hart	1889-1910
Rufus S. Underwood	1910-1913
Robert L. F. Berry	1914-1915
Frederick M. Hollister	1915-1920
Fred R. Bunker	1920-1926
James Anderson, Jr.	1926-1928
Charles W. Legge	1928-1941
Paul R. Lynn	1941-1942
Carl A. Hansen	1942-1944
Marvin P. Halverson	1944-1946
Albert C. Ronander	1946-

Two hundred and fifty copies of this book were printed by Betty & Ralph Sollitt, as a labor of love for the old Meeting-House, at The Redcoat Press, at Westport, Connecticut. Collotype illustrations by the Meriden Gravure Company, Meriden, Conn.

June 1951